

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides an overview of the study, beginning with background that highlights the importance of English-speaking performance in tourism sector, particularly among tour guides in Kupang City. It then presents a research problem that underlines the existing gap between the communicative demands of the profession and the actual abilities of local tour guides. The chapter further states the research questions, followed by aims of the study, significance, which outlines potential contributions both scientifically and practically. Finally, this introduction chapter explains the implications and applications of the study findings, which are expected to improve the quality of tour guiding services in the region.

1.1. Background

Tour guides play a crucial role in tourism industry, not only as providers of information but also as cultural mediators who bridge cultural differences between tourists and host communities. Through their interactions with tourists, tour guides introduce local values, traditions, and identities while shaping tourists' overall perceptions of a destination. Effective communication skills are therefore essential, as they influence tourists' comfort, satisfaction, and understanding of local culture. According to the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2022), tourism professionals act as cultural ambassadors whose communication competence contributes to cultural diplomacy and destination branding. In this context, English proficiency among tour guides should be regarded not merely as a technical

skill, but as a strategic requirement that supports sustainability and global competitiveness of tourism destinations.

Kupang, the capital city of East Nusa Tenggara Province (NTT), possesses significant tourism potential and serves as a gateway to various leading destinations in eastern Indonesia. The city offers diverse attractions, including marine tourism, cultural heritage, and natural landscapes, which have increasingly attracted international tourists. Kupang plays a strategic role in shaping tourists' first impressions of the region. Prideaux and Cooper (2021) emphasize that gateway cities are critical in regional tourism development because they influence accessibility, service quality, and visitor experiences. In this regard, local tour guides in Kupang are frontline actors who directly interact with tourists and significantly shape their travel experiences.

In Kupang, tour guides who are members of the Indonesian Tour Guide Association (Himpunan Pramuwisata Indonesia/HPI), particularly those affiliated with DPC HPI (Dewan Perwakilan Cabang Himpunan Pramuwisata Indonesia) Kupang, are responsible for delivering professional services to foreign tourists. As an officially recognized professional organization, HPI is tasked with fostering tour guide professionalism through training, certification, and competency development in line with industry standards. However, preliminary observations and professional experiences indicate that many tour guides in Kupang still face challenges in using English effectively, especially in terms of fluency, accuracy, and pronunciation. Mulder (2021) argues that professional competence requires continuous development and

alignment between industry standards and actual performance, suggesting the need for systematic evaluation of tour guides' language skills.

Fluency is a key component of English speaking performance, as it reflects a speaker's ability to express ideas smoothly without excessive pauses or hesitation. For tour guides, fluent speech enables natural, engaging, and interactive communication with tourists. Nevertheless, many tour guides in Kupang encounter difficulties in maintaining fluency, particularly during spontaneous interactions with foreign visitors. Segalowitz (2021) explains that second language fluency develops through frequent use and efficient cognitive processing, highlighting the importance of real-life speaking practice in professional contexts.

Accuracy is another essential aspect of English speaking proficiency. It refers to the correct use of grammar, sentence structure, and vocabulary to convey information clearly and precisely. For tour guides, accuracy is crucial to avoid misunderstandings that may arise from grammatical or lexical errors. Inaccurate language use can also negatively affect a tour guide's professional image. In context of Kupang, challenges related to accuracy are often associated with limited formal English education and a lack of continuous language training, as Ellis (2022) emphasizes that accuracy in second language performance develops through structured instruction and consistent corrective feedback.

Pronunciation constitutes a vital element of oral communication, particularly in interactions with international tourists. Mispronunciation can alter word meanings and cause confusion, thereby disrupting effective

communication. Clear and intelligible pronunciation enhances tourists' trust in a tour guide's competence and professionalism. Conversely, inaccurate pronunciation may create negative impressions even when the information provided is factually correct. Derwing and Munro (2021) assert that intelligibility, rather than native-like pronunciation, is the most important factor in professional communication contexts.

Fluency, accuracy, and pronunciation collectively serve as primary indicators of English speaking performance. These aspects are especially relevant for tour guides who are required to communicate directly with foreign tourists on a daily basis. As Brown and Lee (2024) suggest that speaking assessment should integrate these three dimensions to reflect authentic communicative demands in real-world settings. Given Kupang's aspiration to develop as an international tourism destination, evaluating tour guides' English speaking performance is both timely and necessary.

Previous studies have highlighted similar challenges faced by local tour guides in the Kupang region. A study conducted in Uitiuh Tuan Village, Kupang Regency, revealed that many tour guides experienced difficulties in fluency due to limited vocabulary, frequent grammatical errors affecting accuracy, and persistent pronunciation problems (Malelak, Riwu, & Conterius, 2022). Some guides were also found to rely on translation applications when interacting with foreign tourists. These findings indicate an urgent need for empirical evaluation of English speaking skills among tour guides in Kupang, particularly those affiliated with DPC HPI. Long (2021)

emphasizes that empirical needs analysis is essential for designing effective language training programs.

This study is therefore important not only for assessing the English speaking performance of tour guides, but also for identifying their training and competency development needs. By examining fluency, accuracy, and pronunciation, organizations such as HPI and local government authorities can develop more targeted and effective training programs. Salas et al. (2022) argue that evidence-based training design leads to improved professional performance and service quality. In the tourism context, improved language competence is expected to enhance tourist satisfaction and support the growth of the local tourism industry.

From an academic perspective, this study contributes to the field of applied linguistics, particularly English for Specific Purposes (ESP). Tour guiding is a profession that requires specialized language skills distinct from general English usage. An in-depth analysis of English speaking performance within the tour guiding context can inform the development of ESP teaching materials, training methods, and curricula aligned with the needs of the tourism industry. Anthony (2021) highlights the importance of profession-specific language analysis in advancing ESP research.

Moreover, this study contributes to the development of theories related to second language speaking performance in professional contexts. While many studies have focused on English language learning in formal educational settings, research on English use in professional tourism contexts remains limited, particularly in local settings such as Kupang. By providing

empirical data from real-world interactions, this study helps fill this research gap. Plonsky and Gonulal (2022) emphasize the value of contextualized second language performance data in refining existing theoretical frameworks.

The urgency of this study is further underscored by globalization and the increasing mobility of international tourists. Modern tourists expect not only attractive destinations but also high-quality professional services. Tour guides with strong English communication skills can deliver more meaningful and memorable experiences, thereby enhancing destination competitiveness. Buhalis and Amaranggana (2023) argue that service quality is a key determinant of destination competitiveness in the global tourism market.

Despite its importance, there is still a lack of systematic and empirical data on the English speaking performance of Dewan Perwakilan Cabang Himpunan Pramuwisata Indonesia (DPC HPI) Kupang tour guides, particularly in terms of fluency, accuracy, and pronunciation. Without such data, training and competency development programs may not effectively address actual needs. Improving tour guides' speaking skills is critical, as it directly influences tourist satisfaction, destination reputation, and the sustainability of the local tourism industry. This concern aligns with needs-based human resource development theory as discussed by Noe (2020).

In summary, this study is significant from practical, academic, and strategic perspectives. Practically, the findings can assist DPC HPI Kupang and related stakeholders in designing English language training programs

based on real professional needs. Academically, the study enriches the limited literature on English speaking performance of tour guides in Eastern Indonesia. Strategically, it supports the development of competitive and professional tourism human resources in line with national tourism development goals, as emphasized in strategic human capital theory (Becker & Smidt, 2021).

1.2. Research Questions

Based on the review background, the writer formulates three research questions as follows:

1. How is English Speaking fluency of DPC HPI Kupang tour guides?
2. How is English Speaking accuracy of DPC HPI Kupang tour guides?
3. How is English speaking pronunciation of DPC HPI Kupang tour guides?

1.3. Aims of Study

Based on the research questions above, the aims of this study are:

1. To find out English language fluency of DPC HPI Kupang tour guides
2. To find out English language accuracy of DPC HPI Kupang tour guides
3. To find out English language pronunciation of DPC HPI Kupang tour guides

1.4. Significance of Study

The significance of this study lies in its scientific potential and practical contributions. From a scientific perspective, it enriches literature on English for Specific Purposes (ESP) in tourism sector, particularly within Indonesian context where study on tour guides' communicative competence remains

limited. From a practical standpoint, the findings serve a valuable reference for tourism stakeholders, language teachers, and local government agencies in developing capacity-building initiatives. By analyzing key elements of fluency, accuracy, and pronunciation, the study identifies both strengths and challenges faced by tour guides in communicating with international tourists. These insights can inform a design of more targeted training programs, ultimately improving quality of communication between tour guides and foreign visitors in Kupang.

1.4.1. Implication

Theoretically, this study has potential to broaden understanding of English-speaking performance within English for Specific Purposes (ESP), especially in the tourism industry. Most international discussions on speaking competence focus on classroom-based learning or general EFL contexts, while professional tour guiding remains underexplored (Nguyen & Newton, 2020; Alizadeh, 2021). By analysing fluency, accuracy, and pronunciation among tour guides in Kupang, this study provides insights into how language functions in authentic intercultural encounters. Such findings may enrich theoretical models of communicative competence by incorporating real-world variables such as cultural mediation, spontaneous interaction, and service-oriented communication. In Indonesian setting, this study contributes to the limited scholarship on ESP in tourism, particularly highlighting linguistic demands faced by local tour guides in East Nusa Tenggara.

1.4.2. Application

Practically, the study offers direct benefits for tourism stakeholders in Kupang and beyond. For the HPI Kupang organization, the results can serve as an evaluative tool to identify areas of improvement in members' English proficiency, leading to more focused training in fluency, accuracy, and pronunciation. For English educators and ESP practitioners, the findings can inform the development of language programs that address communicative needs of tour guides, moving beyond general English instruction to context-specific skills. At policy level, the insights gained from this study can assist local government and tourism boards in enhancing quality of human resources, thereby improving visitor satisfaction and strengthening Kupang's image as an international tourist destination. On a broader scale, this study can serve as a reference for other regions in Indonesia seeking to align language training with global standards of tourism communication.